



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PROMISE TO PROTECT GREAT BEAR RAINFOREST BECOMES REALITY – FIVE-YEAR PLAN IN PLACE

A Place Where Environment and Economy Are In Tune Emerging on Canada's West Coast

March 31, 2009, Vancouver, British Columbia – The promise made three years ago to protect one-third of British Columbia's globally unique Great Bear Rainforest and develop the foundations for a conservation-based economy in the region has been fulfilled. Today's announcement is greatly welcomed by ForestEthics, Greenpeace and Sierra Club BC, the three leading environmental groups that have worked with the B.C. government, First Nations and industry leaders to ensure the promise would be kept. Today's announcement lays out the tremendous ecological and economic gains for the region and the long-term commitment to ensure the health of the rainforest and communities.

"A vision born from environmental and economic necessity is becoming a reality on Canada's west coast," said Stephanie Goodwin of Greenpeace. "It's a conservation model that other parts of the world can look to, a model that shows how protection of ecological values and human well-being can be advanced without undermining each other."

Major milestones achieved are:

- 2.1 million hectares, or 5 million acres, an area half the size of Switzerland, have been legally protected from logging.
- \$120 million is available to First Nation communities to help kick-start a new conservation economy as an alternative to logging throughout the rainforest.
- A new system of 'lighter touch' logging, based on Ecosystem-based Management (EBM), has been legislated. This system maintains 50 per cent of the natural level of old growth forest in the region. This translates to an additional 700,000 hectares (1.7 million acres) of forest set aside from logging.

All parties involved in achieving today's major milestones agree that transitioning from a resource-based economy to a conservation-based economy will require more time. Environmental groups, along with the B.C. government, industry and First Nations, have endorsed a five-year plan that will see the long-term goals of low ecological risk and high quality of life in communities achieved by 2014. To meet this goal, annual reports will assess progress.

"The Great Bear Rainforest is now one of the most protected forest regions in the world," said Jens Wieting of Sierra Club BC. "But we must continue to meet key milestones we've set to achieve our long term goals of full ecosystem health and thriving local communities."

The five-year plan includes:

- Milestones for reaching 70 per cent old growth maintained over time, from 50 per cent
- Ongoing science-based collaborative planning
- Development of a reserve network outside of the protected areas

"If everyone remains committed to the goals and follows through, this astoundingly rich coastal ecosystem will continue to support iconic species like the Spirit bear, the conservation of massive carbon storehouses in thousand year old trees and a bright future for the First Nations communities," said Valerie Langer of ForestEthics.

Today's announcement is the result of intensive work by the BC government and First Nations governments in collaboration with Western Forest Products, BC Timber Sales, Canfor, Catalyst Paper, Interfor and the three environmental organizations.

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